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Articles in Today's Clips

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BRIAN DICKERSON

Hard lemonade, hard price Dad's oversight at Tigers game lands son in foster care

BY BRIAN DICKERSON • FREE PRESS COLUMNIST • APRIL 28, 2008

If you watch much television, you've probably heard of a product called Mike's Hard Lemonade.

And if you ask Christopher Ratte and his wife how they lost custody of their 7-year-old son, the short version is that nobody in the Ratte family watches much television.

The way police and child protection workers figure it, Ratte should have known that what a Comerica Park vendor handed over when Ratte ordered a lemonade for his boy three Saturdays ago contained alcohol, and Ratte's ignorance justified placing young Leo in foster care until his dad got up to speed on the commercial beverage industry.

Even if, in hindsight, that decision seems a bit, um, idiotic.

Ratte is a tenured professor of classical archaeology at the University of Michigan, which means that, on a given day, he's more likely to be excavating ancient burial sites in Turkey than watching "Dancing with the Stars" -- or even the History Channel, for that matter.

The 47-year-old academic says he wasn't even aware alcoholic lemonade existed when he and Leo stopped at a concession stand on the way to their seats in Section 114.

"I'd never drunk it, never purchased it, never heard of it," Ratte of Ann Arbor told me sheepishly last week. "And it's certainly not what I expected

when I ordered a lemonade for my 7-year-old."

But it wasn't until the top of the ninth inning that a Comerica Park security guard noticed the bottle in young Leo's hand.

"You know this is an alcoholic beverage?" the guard asked the professor.

"You've got to be kidding," Ratte replied. He asked for the bottle, but the security guard snatched it before Ratte could examine the label.

Mistake or child neglect?

An hour later, Ratte was being interviewed by a Detroit police officer at Children's Hospital, where a physician at the Comerica Park clinic had dispatched Leo -- by ambulance! -- after a cursory exam.

Leo betrayed no symptoms of inebriation. But the physician and a police officer from the Comerica substation suggested the ER visit after the boy admitted he was feeling a little nauseated.

The Comerica cop estimated that Leo had drunk about 12 ounces of the hard lemonade, which is 5% alcohol. But an ER resident who drew Leo's blood less than 90 minutes after he and his father were escorted from their seats detected no trace of alcohol.

"Completely normal appearing," the resident wrote in his report, "... he is cleared to go home."

But it would be two days before the state of Michigan allowed Ratte's wife, U-M architecture professor Claire Zimmerman, to take their son home, and nearly a week before Ratte was permitted to move back into his own house.

And if you think nothing so ludicrous could happen to your family, maybe you should pay a little less attention to who's getting booted from "Dancing with the Stars" and a little more to how the state agency responsible for protecting Michigan's children is going about its work.

Doing their duty

Almost everyone Chris Ratte met the night they took Leo away conceded the state was probably overreacting.

The sympathetic cop who interviewed Ratte and his son at the hospital said she was convinced what happened had been an accident, but that her supervisor was insisting the matter be referred to Child Protective Services.

And Ratte thought the two child protection workers who came to take Leo away seemed more annoyed with the police than with him. "This is so unnecessary," one told Ratte before driving away with his son.

But there was really nothing any of them could do, they all said. They were just adhering to protocol, following orders.

And so what had begun as an outing to the ballpark ended with Leo crying himself to sleep in front of a television inside the Child Protective Services building, and Ratte and his wife standing on the sidewalk outside, wondering when they'd see their little boy again.

A vain rescue mission

Child Protective Services is the unit of the Michigan Department of Human Services responsible for intervening when someone suspects a child is being abused, neglected or endangered. Its powers include the authority to remove children from their homes and transfer them to foster parents who answer only to the state.

By law, CPS officials are forbidden to discuss the particulars of any investigation.

But Mike Patterson, Child and Family Services director for the Wayne County district that includes Comerica Park, said that in general his agency's discretion is limited once police obtain a court order to remove a child from the parental home -- usually authorized, as in Leo's case, by a juvenile court referee responding to a police officer's recommendation.

"Once the court has authorized a child's removal," Patterson told me, "we cannot return the child to the parental custody" until the court has OK'd it.

But that doesn't explain why CPS refused to release Leo to the custody of two aunts -- one a social worker and licensed foster parent -- who drove all night from New England to take custody of their nephew.

Chris Ratte's sisters, Catherine Miller and Felicity Ratte, left Massachusetts at 10:30 the night of the fateful lemonade purchase after the police officer who'd reluctantly requested a removal order told Ratte the state would likely jump at the chance to place Leo with responsible relatives. But when the two women arrived at the CPS office early Sunday, a caseworker explained they would not be allowed to see Leo until they had secured a hotel room.

The sisters quickly complied. But by the time they returned to CPS around 10:30 a.m., their nephew had been taken to an undisclosed foster home, where he would remain until a preliminary court hearing the following afternoon.

By that Monday, April 7, when Ratte and his wife returned for a meeting with Latricia Jones, the CPS caseworker assigned to their case, no one in the family had been able to talk to Leo for a day and a half.

More investigation needed

At a hearing later that day, Jones recommended that Leo remain in foster care until she had completed her investigation, a process she estimated would take several days. It was only after the assistant attorney general who represented CPS admitted that the state was not interested in pursuing the case aggressively that juvenile referee Leslie Graves agreed to release Leo to his mother -- on the condition that Ratte himself relocate to a hotel.

Finally, at a second hearing three days later, Graves dismissed the complaint and permitted Ratte to move home.

Don Duquette, a U-M law professor who directs the university's Child Advocacy Law Clinic, represented Ratte and his wife. He notes sardonically

that the most remarkable thing about the couple's case may be the relative speed with which they were reunited with Leo.

Duquette says the emergency removal powers of CPS, though "well-intentioned" are "out of control and partly responsible for the large numbers of kids in the foster care system," which is almost universally acknowledged to be badly overburdened.

Ratte and his wife have filed a formal complaint with the CPS ombudsman's office.

"I have apologized to Leo from the bottom of my heart for the silly mistake that got him into this mess," Ratte wrote in the complaint. "But I have also told him that what happened afterward was an even bigger error, and I would like to be able to say to him that institutions, like people, can learn from their mistakes."

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Ann Arbor man's 'mistake' at ballpark separates him from son

Midday update

ASSOCIATED PRESS • APRIL 28, 2008

DETROIT - A son's thirst and a father's oversight at the ballpark turned an otherwise fun outing into an ordeal for one family.

Christopher Ratte of Ann Arbor recently took his 7-year-old son, Leo, to a Detroit Tigers game and stopped at a Comerica Park concession stand to buy him some lemonade. But it wasn't until the top of the ninth inning, when a security guard asked the University of Michigan classical archaeology professor about the bottle in his son's hand, that Ratte learned what puts the hard in Mike's Hard Lemonade.

"I'd never drunk it, never purchased it, never heard of it," Christopher Ratte told Detroit Free Press columnist Brian Dickerson for a story published Monday.

Ratte said he told the guard he had no idea that the \$7 lemonade contained alcohol. But when he tried to look at the bottle, the security guard snatched it - and his son was taken to a ballpark's medical clinic. The mistake three weeks ago began a two-day stay for Leo in state custody and nearly a week before his father would be able to move back into his home.

Leo was taken by ambulance to Detroit's Children Hospital because clinic officials said he reported feeling a little nauseated after drinking about 12 ounces of the drink with a 5 percent alcohol content. But a blood sample taken at the hospital detected no trace of it.

Ratte said the workers from the state's Child Protective Services unit told him that day the intervention was unnecessary but they were just following orders.

Child protection officials cannot by law discuss a specific investigation. But Mike Patterson, Child and Family Services director for the Wayne County district that includes Comerica Park, said his agency's discretion is limited once police obtain a court order to remove a child from the home.

An assistant state attorney general said the state had no interest in aggressively pursuing the case, so a juvenile referee on April 7 agreed to release Leo to his mother as long as his father relocated to a hotel. Three days later, the complaint was dismissed and Christopher Ratte was allowed to go home.

Ratte and his wife have filed a formal complaint with the Child Protective Services ombudsman's office.

Ratte wrote in his complaint that he has apologized to his son "for the silly mistake that got him into this mess."

"But I have also told him that what happened afterward was an even bigger error, and I would like to be able to say to him that institutions, like people, can learn from their mistakes."

Information from: Detroit Free Press, <http://www.freep.com>

OUR VOICE: REPORT CARD for April 26

Posted by [Jackson Citizen Patriot](#) April 26, 2008 08:04AM

How politicians and community leaders responded to issues raised on the newspaper's opinion page:

The issue: Ricky Holland and child welfare

Grade

C-

What we said: "It is not enough for reports to be issued and Department of Human Services to tell us how devastated employees are. There must be accountability." (Dec. 17, 2006)

What has happened: By the end of 2006, even state officials had to concede the Department of Human Services made grievous mistakes in the case of Ricky Holland. The 7-year-old boy (and former Jackson resident) was killed by his adoptive parents, despite warning signs he was being abused.

This week, the state department created the Child Welfare Improvement Task Force to revamp Michigan's child-protection system. The group will have 70 members from an array of backgrounds and look at the system for the next year.

It's a step, but progress here is too slow. Task forces can spur on change, but they also can spin their wheels mulling over ideas instead of promoting action.

And with 70 representatives, how will this task force ever get anything done?



Monday, April 28, 2008

Churches start drive to cover uninsured

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

Angel Kreutzans has been hobbling around for a month since her minivan broke down and the vehicle ran over her left foot as a truck began towing it.

Her husband keeps telling her to go to the emergency room, but the mother of three reminds him that she is among the 1 million Michigan residents without health insurance.

"I refuse to go to the hospital because I cannot afford it," said Kreutzans, a Warren resident.

That's why Kreutzans, 37, signed a petition Sunday at her church, Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, to push an initiative onto the November ballot that would require Michigan lawmakers to come up with a plan for universal health care.

The Warren-based church was among 200 Protestant and Catholic churches across the state that worked to collect 20,000 signatures for the Health Care for Michigan campaign, which began in January and needs 375,000 signatures by July 7 to appear on the November ballot. The effort has garnered 110,000 signatures.

"The church is concerned (that) so many people do not have health insurance," said the Rev. Jane Moschenrose, pastor of Wellspring Church, an American Baptist congregation in Farmington Hills. "It's a justice, economic and health issue. But it's primarily a justice issue: Everybody should have access to medical care."

The interfaith effort kicked off the annual national Cover the Uninsured Week, aimed at highlighting the 47 million Americans nationally without health insurance, including 1,070,791 Michiganians.

Today, an all-day health expo at Cobo Center will feature 70 vendors offering free health screenings and help enrolling uninsured children and adults in government-funded health plans.

Michigan health leaders also plan to gather to talk about the state's efforts to address the uninsured, including Gov. Jennifer Granholm's stalled \$1 billion plan to provide universal health care. Announced in 2006, Granholm's plan requires a federal waiver. Granholm plans to work with the next president after he or she is elected in November, according to James McCurtis Jr., Michigan Department of Community Health spokesman.

In the meantime, a coalition of labor, business, faith-based and health care activists is collecting signatures to ask voters to amend the state constitution to require the Legislature to find a way to cover uninsured residents, make health care plans more efficient and control spiraling health care costs.

Spearheaded by the Michigan Universal Health Care Access Network and endorsed by dozens of groups, the initiative was conceived after a Massachusetts group used a similar strategy to propel state

policymakers there to reform the health care system.

The Detroit Regional Chamber has not opposed the grass-roots Michigan effort, but it commissioned a poll last month of 200 business leaders that showed 46 percent opposed to amending the constitution, 27 percent in favor and 27 percent without an opinion.

"If our business leaders are a reflection of the general population, this issue has a lot of challenges before it can pass," said Sarah Hubbard, the chamber's vice president of government relations.

But John Freeman, coordinator of the campaign, said the initiative does not set forth a specific plan; rather, it requires lawmakers to act on the issue.

"Our strategy is to be inclusive, to get everybody involved to figure out what makes sense," Freeman said. "This is the most positive, inclusive approach to have. If individual business members knew that, they would be more supportive."

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Find this article at:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080428/LIFESTYLE03/804280384>

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Tales of the uninsured in Genesee County reflect depth of health care problem

by Elizabeth Shaw | The Flint Journal

Saturday April 26, 2008, 7:30 PM

GENESEE COUNTY, Michigan -- Anthony Brown, 44, never thought he'd end up with failing eyesight, bad teeth and one lung, dragging an oxygen tank behind him everywhere he goes.

Even with Medicaid and Medicare, he's unable to cover hundreds of dollars in deductibles and co-pays for monthly medical prescriptions for himself, a severely autistic teenage son, and a diabetic wife.

"We do a budget. But every month we run out of food and my wife has to get samples from her doctor to treat her diabetes," said the former real estate appraiser, who had to quit working when he became ill.

Nancy Osborn, 47, never thought she'd have to battle cancer without Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan - until the Grand Blanc manufacturing plant where she worked shut down in 2005. COBRA coverage - in which former employees pay to temporarily continue their workplace medical insurance - costs too much to be practical.

"COBRA was over \$338 a month just for a single person. I was making \$1,448 a month on unemployment and my household bills were \$1,438 a month. So I had to let the health insurance go," she said.

Nearly three years later, her cancer is in remission but she is still grappling with collectors over more than \$14,000 in medical bills.

The good news: her unemployment has run out so she now qualifies for the Genesee Health Plan, which provides some benefits to low-income county residents who don't qualify for Medicaid or Medicare.

The most disturbing thing?

Their situations are not unique.

They're not even out of the ordinary.

And it's becoming more common every day.

As of 2006, more than 13 percent of Michigan residents ages 25-64 did not have health insurance.

Right now, about 60,000 people of all ages are uninsured in Genesee County, according to Health Access, a resource center that helps local residents find their way through the health care maze.

Health Access is hosting local events Monday through Friday for national Cover the Uninsured Week, to raise public awareness about the plight of the uninsured.

State and federal programs have become so complicated that many who may qualify for help can't figure out how to get it, said Frank Woods, a Health Access caseworker.

"Some of the systems we have in place are so doggone confusing people get frustrated with the process itself and just give up. It can take hours just to get a human being on the phone," said Woods.

Medicaid picked up the tab in 1999 when Brown spent weeks hospitalized for tuberculosis at Hurley Medical Center and then at the University of Michigan Medical Center in Ann Arbor, where doctors removed a lung.

"They said we'll treat you even though you don't have the money. The care was as good as it gets," said Brown.

But massive changes to Medicare in 2006 turned everything upside down.

"I went to pick up my prescriptions is when it hit me. I was paying three or four dollars on each one and now they're telling me I have all these co-pays and deductibles," said Brown.

"My cough medicine alone was over \$200. I have to carry an oxygen tank and I guess the bill is coming for that, too."

Medicare patients now have to choose from literally hundreds of drug plans, Woods said, and it's even more complicated for people such as Brown who have a combination of Medicaid and Medicare.

"His issue in a nutshell is a lack of resources and ending up with two very poor plans because he didn't know, was never informed or didn't understand what had happened to his coverage," said Woods.

"Now picture being 70 years old with limited, if any, computer access and no one to explain all this new stuff to you. Then you get a letter telling you to go to a website and figure it out.

"This is what our seniors go through every day."

Nancy Osborn's situation is part of another disturbing trend.

Of 47 million Americans without health care coverage in 2006, more than 33 million had household incomes of \$25,000 or more - well above the federal poverty line of \$20,000 for a family of four.

More than 80 percent of Genesee County's uninsured are members of working families. Like Osborn, many are falling through the gaps in the existing public health care system.

"We see a lot of people whose income is too high to qualify for public benefits programs but it's not high enough to realistically pay for insurance. Or they have some type of coverage but it's not complete enough and they

can't pay for the services they still need," said Health Access Director Marcy Buren.

"There's a huge gap in coverage. That's one of the hardest things to tell someone, that there isn't anything available for their particular situation." Osborn got sick a month after being laid off.

"I went to a free clinic. It was a nightmare but I had no choice. You'd spend the whole day just waiting to get in," she said.

In March 2006, surgeons at McLaren Regional Medical Center removed a cancerous lymph node from under her arm.

The bill: more than \$14,000.

"The hospital's lawyers were really nice. They kept trying to get Medicaid to cover it but I was still getting unemployment so they turned me down. It's still never been paid," said Osborn.

Health Access and hospital staffers finally helped her qualify for limited coverage to pay thousands of dollars in chemotherapy treatments at the Great Lakes Cancer institute, a McLaren health service. But the plan did not cover an Ann Arbor specialist her doctors wanted her to see for a follow-up evaluation.

"I went anyway," she said. "Nobody paid the bills. That's gone into collections now too, along with the bone marrow tests and all the other stuff."

Meanwhile, Osborn completed a degree in social work and is hoping to find a new career within the corrections field. She still requires regular testing and check-ups to monitor her condition.

"Thank God for Health Access. I didn't even know they existed until I needed them. Now I just want to help spread the word," she said.

Health Access helps more than 3,000 people every year, with eight staffers and a handful of interns and volunteers.

They worked with pharmaceutical companies to donate more than \$4.3 million in prescription medicines in 2007 and link with dozens of agencies to coordinate services and advocate for clients' health care needs.

"Health care should be a basic right, not a privilege. There shouldn't be a need for an organization like ours, to help you navigate through a system this complicated," said Buren.

"Hopefully, maybe someday we'll get there. But for now, we encourage everybody who's having an issue with access to medical care to give us a call.

"We never want to make promises but we've developed a lot of resources we can utilize. You just get on the phone and start making calls."

211 hotline to free care nears Safety Net Resource Center to connect uninsured Detroitters to health programs

BY PATRICIA ANSTETT • FREE PRESS MEDICAL WRITER • APRIL 28, 2008

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Metro Detroit is getting a new resource center to help uninsured people or those with limited coverage find free health care and prescription drugs.

The Safety Net Resource Center is to begin operations within the next few weeks, run by the Detroit Wayne County Health Authority and 25 community organizations.

Callers to United Way's 211 hotline will receive information on where to find free care, said Chris Allen, chief executive officer of the health authority. The authority, which helps coordinate information on uninsured and underinsured people in the area, is able to offer the additional help because federal and state funds have helped the agency's budget grow from \$2 million several years ago to \$8 million today, Allen said.

The program hopes to hook up consumers with doctors and clinics at a so-called medical home where a person's care can be centralized.

"It's where they belong, not in the emergency department," Allen said. It will focus on Detroit's east side, where some 90,000 people are uninsured or underinsured, Allen said.

The authority also is working with several dozen community organizations to enroll some 150,000 Michiganders who qualify for Medicaid but who currently are not enrolled in the program, Allen said.

Contact **PATRICIA ANSTETT** at panstett@freepress.com.

Michigan Report

April 25, 2008

HEALTH CARE BALLOT PROPOSAL OPPOSED BY CHAMBER

A ballot proposal that would require the Legislature to enact mandatory health insurance coverage for all residents was officially opposed by the Michigan Chamber of Commerce on Friday, with the organization calling the proposal effectively a "blank check" requirement on businesses to pay the costs of the proposal. Meanwhile, a major push to get signatures for the Healthcare for Michigan ballot proposal was also announced.

On Sunday, some 200 churches across the state will announce they are supporting the effort to put the proposal on the ballot. On Monday, a new door-to-door petition signature effort to help the proposal secure the signatures needed to put the measure before the voters.

The proposal, if adopted, would amend the constitution to require the Legislature to enact comprehensive health care coverage for all residents. The amendment does not stipulate by when such coverage must be enacted or whether it would replace insurance provided through employers.

The Michigan Chamber, joined by the Grand Rapids Chamber that also opposed the measure, said the proposal was wide open and undefined.

A spokesperson for the Chamber also said the proposal would spark years of litigation if passed.

STURGIS JOURNAL

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Walkers hit the pavement to raise funds for the hungry

[Print Page](#)

BY TERRY KATZ
STURGIS JOURNAL

Sturgis was the scene of its 37th Sturgis Area CROP Walk Sunday afternoon.

The three-mile walk began in mid-afternoon at Sturgis First United Methodist Church, 200 Pleasant St.

While participation seemed light, veteran organizer Earl Arend was confident that walkers would meet their goal of \$13,000. "We've got a lot of competition today with other events happening in the city," he said.

Honorary chairperson was the Rev. Keith Treman of First United Methodist Church.

CROP stands for Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty.

Sturgis is one of only a few Michigan areas to have been participating for over 30 years.

Total income statewide from last year's CROP Walk was \$2,720,810. Seventy-five percent of that money goes to worldwide charities while 25 percent stays in the community for local needs.



People participating in Sunday's 37th Sturgis Area CROP Walk left Sturgis First United Methodist Church on Pleasant Street promptly at 2 p.m. for a three-mile walk around the city. There was a refreshment stop at the Salvation Army headquarters on Fourth Street.

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THE DAILY Reporter

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Local food pantry's needs continue to grow

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By roland stoy-Staff writer

COLDWATER — According to news reports, hunger worldwide has become a crisis.

There are hungry people here in Branch County, and for the Branch Area Food Pantry, the need for support constantly grows.

"There are more people unemployed and under-employed than ever before," said Ann Lown of the pantry board. "More people are coming in all the time. There's new people signing up every day."

Lown said that while the shelves at the Deacon Al Provot Distribution Center are not getting bare, they are definitely not full.

For example, she said the center has been out of peanut butter for weeks.

"We have to remember that many people coming in don't even have homes. Peanut Butter provides nutrition right out of the jar," she said.

Said Lown, "We don't want the community to think people don't give, but the need keeps increasing."

In addition, she shared some numbers from the pantry's annual report for 2007, including the distribution of some 276,000 pounds of emergency food needs, in addition to the 2,500 holiday meals, and the number of households served increased 23 percent over 2006, bringing the number of households served to 1,982, or about 6,000 individuals.

"Who are these individuals? 28 percent are under the age of 14 and 10 percent have individuals 65 years old or older," she said.

Food purchased with fund donations in 2007 came to \$99,000, with food donations of an estimated value of \$81,000. The total estimated value of food distributed was \$180,000.

"This means that for about every \$5 donated, we provide about 10 pounds of food," Lown shared.

Also In 2007, the new Hunters Against Hunger campaign resulted in over 2,700 pounds of venison.

On a positive note this year, land has been plowed at the Branch Area Careers Center, and again this season the Community Garden Project will help feed the needy.

Last year about 2,000 pounds of produce were harvested.

Lown encouraged all who are planting gardens to "plant a row for the hungry," and she noted many who brought surplus vegetables into the pantry over the season.

The pantry, at (517) 279-0966, is open all day for donations, and she reminds the public that contributions are tax deductible.

"We are truly blessed with the individuals, churches, service organizations, private sector

companies, social sector organizations, institutions, and schools who continue to help us feed the hungry in Branch County. Without everyone doing their part, we couldn't do what we do. We Feed the Hungry," said Lown.

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Article published Apr 25, 2008
Disadvantaged kids visit with Granholm
The Enquirer

A group of 17 children and teens participating in the Haven of Rest's Gain Access Program traveled to Lansing to meet with Gov. Jennifer Granholm on Wednesday.

The Gain Access Program seeks to connect homeless children with valuable services like special education and after school activities to break the cycle of homelessness after the Haven cannot serve them.

The governor greeted the children at the state Capitol, taking questions and then shaking hands and posing for pictures.

"The idea of the visit is part of the ongoing efforts to increase awareness of the homeless problem in our community and the effects it has on the young people involved," said Denise Shepard, GAP coordinator.

Community Inclusive Recreation provided transportation for the students.

For more information on the Haven of Rest's Gain Access Program, contact Shepard at 965-1148, extension 25.
